Guided by Science

Like Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon, our Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure. But unlike Yellowstone, it is home to 18 million people who depend on the Bay as the natural engine that powers our region’s economy. Yet in the past two hundred years, we have transformed the ecology of the Bay and much of its six-state watershed, resulting in the severe degradation of the nation’s largest estuary.

But science tells us that there is hope. Since the Chesapeake Bay Program was established in 1983, partners including The Nature Conservancy (TNC), have used science to identify priorities, set targets, and track progress toward those goals. The body of scientific knowledge within the Chesapeake Bay watershed is unrivaled, virtually anywhere else in the world, and TNC is a major contributor to that body of scientific work. As the world’s largest conservation organization, TNC’s work in the Bay watershed helps shape conservation programs around the world.

Our Impact

250,000 acres
Of land has been protected by TNC across the watershed, including 85 nature preserves that provide critical habitat and recreation for people.

40+
TNC conservation, science, and government relations professionals work on Bay issues across the watershed.

2.0 GPA
The latest Chesapeake Bay report card gave the Bay an overall grade of “C.” A vast improvement from years past, but a reminder that we have more work to do.
Our Solutions

Promote Sustainable Agriculture
Agricultural nutrient runoff is the largest contributor to water pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. Farmers understand this and have become increasingly willing to adopt conservation practices that are good for business and the environment. TNC is focused on restoring clean water and healthy habitat in the Bay by engaging with the agribusinesses that supply farmers across the watershed.

Prevent Urban Stormwater Pollution
Urban stormwater runoff is the fastest growing source of pollution to the Chesapeake Bay. TNC is working both on-the-ground, and through helping shape smart policies, in cities and states across the Bay watershed to curb stormwater pollution.

Bring Back a Keystone Species
One oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water each day. However, oyster populations in the Bay are now less than 1% of their pre-European settlement numbers. TNC is focused on supporting the restoration of large-scale oyster sanctuaries in the 10 tributaries identified by the Chesapeake Bay Program.

Restore Wetlands
Wetlands across the Bay watershed play a critical role in water quality by storing and filtering water as it moves across the landscape. Wetlands also offer some of the most biodiverse habitat in the world. TNC is uniquely positioned to lead large-scale wetland restoration projects in some of the watershed’s most important river basins.

Protect Land
Land protection is the oldest tool in TNC’s toolbox, and one that is still deployed across the six-state Chesapeake Bay watershed to support our conservation goals. Within the Chesapeake basin, TNC has protected roughly 250,000 acres of land, including nearly 85 nature preserves that we own and manage for recreation and habitat.

Tackle Climate Change
When it comes to sea level rise, Chesapeake Bay coastal communities are the third most at-risk in the U.S. To protect the conservation gains made over the past nearly 70 years, TNC is tackling climate change in the Bay and around the world by promoting climate-smart policies and natural climate solutions, and building resilient communities.

A Message From The Chesapeake Bay Program Director

The Bay’s size and complexity compels us to take a collaborative conservation approach across six state and the District of Columbia, including a legion of partners. TNC is helping to lead the way in showing how nature-based solutions—in our cities, in our farm fields, along our rivers, and in the Bay itself—can achieve clean water that benefits nature and people. With your support, we can make the Chesapeake Bay restoration the world’s greatest success story, demonstrating to the world how committed people can restore an entire ecosystem.

Mark Bryer
Chesapeake Bay Program Director